

**OFFICE OF ZONING AND ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
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**SPECIAL EXCEPTION OF HELEN MERCEDES CLEMENS
CASE NO. S.E. 97-1**

ORDER OF REVOCATION

Background

Special Exception 97-1 was granted to Petitioner Helen Mercedes Clemens by the Hearing Examiner, on November 20, 1996, to permit the operation of a riding stable for not more than two horses, at 21105 Cozy Court, Gaithersburg, Maryland. For the reasons outlined below, this order will revoke the special exception in accordance with the recommendation of the Department of Permitting Services (DPS).

On March 20, 2017, Jennyffer Vargas, DPS Permitting and Code Enforcement Inspector, sent a memorandum (Exhibit 4(b))¹ to the Board of Appeals referring the above-captioned case for revocation. On April 12, 2017, the Board of Appeals forwarded the matter to the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings (OZAH) for action (Exhibits 1, 2 and 3).

DPS based the revocation request on the following facts, as outlined in Ms. Vargas's memorandum of March 20, 2017 (Exhibit 4(b)):

A recent field inspection revealed that the above cited Special Exceptions for a Non-commercial riding stable for two horses (SE-97-1) located at 21105 Cozy Court, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882, has been abandoned. Also, the current owner of the property has requested the abandonment of the special exception via email

In accordance to Section 59-7.3.1.L.7, of the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance, DPS is referring SE-971 to the Board to revoke the Special Exception as abandoned.

The documents referenced by Ms. Vargas are in the record as Exhibits 4(a) and 4(c). Exhibit 4(c) is the Maryland SDAT real property record showing that the current owners of the subject property are Luke and Jennifer Hodgson. Based on this documentation, the Hearing Examiner finds that the registered holder of the special exception is no longer the owner of the subject site.

Exhibit 4(a) is an email dated February 13, 2017, from property owner Luke Hodgson to Ms. Vargas, stating,

Pursuant to our conversation earlier today, I am writing to inform you that the special exception listed on our property, 21105 Cozy Court, Gaithersburg,

¹ The file in this ancient case could not be located in OZAH's records. Therefore, a new file was established to contain the revocation documents, and the Exhibit List references only the new exhibits regarding revocation.

Maryland 20882, can be removed. That exception was for the previous owners, who kept horses on the property. We moved to the property on March 8, 2016. We do not have horses nor do we intend to ever have horses on the property.

Based on this evidence and the submission of Ms. Vargas, the Hearing Examiner finds that the current property owners seek to have the special exception revoked as abandoned. Given these facts, revocation of the special exception, based on abandonment, appears appropriate.

Opinion

Pursuant to Section 7.7.1.B.1. of the 2014 Zoning Ordinance, special exceptions approved before October 30, 2014 must be reviewed under the standards of the Zoning Ordinance in effect on October 29, 2014 (*i.e.*, under the old, 2004 Zoning Ordinance). Since the subject special exception clearly falls into that category, it will be reviewed under the old Ordinance.

Section 59-G-1.3(d) of the old Zoning Ordinance provides, in relevant part:

- (1) If, after making an inspection of a property governed by special exception, the Department finds that the special exception use as granted has been abandoned, it must forward written notice of its findings to the last recorded holder of the special exception and to the property owner, advising of the Department's finding and directing that they forward to the Department, within 60 days from the date of mailing of the notice, a written statement confirming the Department's finding that the special exception has been abandoned or challenging said finding and requesting that said special exception be continued.*
- (2) If the Department receives a written response from the special exception holder and the property owner acknowledges that the special exception has been abandoned, the Department must notify the Board of its findings, and the Board², upon receipt of such notice, must adopt and issue a written resolution finding the special exception to have been abandoned and ordering the special exception revoked.*
- (3) If within the provided 60-day period, the Department receives a written statement from either the special exception holder or the property owner challenging the Department's findings and requesting that the special exception be continued, the Department must notify the Board, and the Board must convene a public hearing, in accordance with the provisions of subsection (e) of this section, to determine whether or not the special exception was abandoned and whether or not the special exception should be revoked.*
- (4) If after 60 days from the date of mailing of the Department's notice, the Department has received no response from either the special exception holder or the property owner, the Department must notify the Board of its findings, and the Board must issue to the special exception holder and the property owner an order to appear before the Board to show cause why the special exception should not be revoked.*

² Although this section refers to the "Board," meaning the Board of Appeals, the Hearing Examiner is authorized by Section 59-G-1.3(f) of the old Zoning Ordinance to conduct the same proceedings with regard to special exceptions, such as this one, that it has issued.

(5) If neither the special exception holder nor the property owner appears before the Board to show cause why the special exception should not be revoked, the Board must adopt and issue a resolution finding the special exception to have been abandoned and ordering the special exception revoked. . . .

As detailed above, a DPS field inspection revealed that the special exception has been abandoned, and the current property owner has confirmed that the special exception has been abandoned. No response has been received from the special exception holder, and DPS apparently has not located the special exception holder.

Under the statutory terms quoted above, if DPS receives a written response from both the special exception holder and the property owner acknowledging that the special exception has been abandoned, the Hearing Examiner must find the special exception to have been abandoned and order the special exception revoked. The Code further provides that if the Department has received no response from either the special exception holder or the property owner, a show cause hearing is required to determine whether the special exception should be revoked. The statutory language does not seem to cover a situation, like this one, where a response confirming abandonment has been received from the property owner, but no response has been received from a special exception holder.

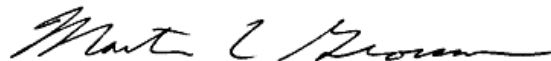
The Hearing Examiner concludes that it would be pointless to issue a notice and schedule a show cause hearing when the indisputable facts clearly establish that the special exception has been abandoned, as confirmed by a DPS field inspection and a statement from the current property owner.

The Department of Permitting Services has met its obligations under Section 59-G-1.3(d)(2), and a reasonable reading of that section now requires the Hearing Examiner to issue a finding that the special exception has been abandoned and order the special exception revoked.

Order

Based on this record, the Hearing Examiner hereby finds that the special exception granted in the above-captioned case has been abandoned. Accordingly, pursuant to Sections 59-G-1.3(d) and 59-G-1.3(f) of the 2004 Zoning Ordinance, Special Exception No. S.E. 97-1 is hereby REVOKED.

Dated: June 16, 2017



Martin L. Grossman
Director and Hearing Examiner
Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings

cc: Luke and Jennifer Hodgson
Jennyffer Vargas, Department of Permitting Services
Planning Department
Board of Appeals